

Recording studio attracts pros and neophytes alike

By Karen Billing

Owning a recording studio can be tough these days, but Carmel Valley's Peter Dyson has found a way to make it work at his space, Studio West in Rancho Bernardo.

Studio West has been a fixture in San Diego since 1971, originally occupying a space in Kearny Mesa. Since 1996, the 8,000 square foot facility has been in Rancho Bernardo, unassumingly tucked into an office park.

"Recording studios have been closing down left, right and center because the economy of the business is really different," said Dyson, who's owned the facility for three and a half years.

The technology has changed — people no longer need thousands of dollars worth of recording equipment, they can buy a box with the same technology for about \$300 at a place such as Guitar Center and record in their bedrooms. Artists are bypassing record labels completely, recording their albums on their own and selling them on the Internet.

But just because people can easily pick up a copy of the technology, doesn't necessarily mean they know how to use it.

"There really is a need for good instructional education on the basic principals of audio engineering," said Dyson. "There's a huge thirst for this kind of knowledge."

That's where Dyson and Studio West come in.

At his studio, Dyson launched The Recording Arts Center (TRAC for short) to become one of the only places in San Diego outside of a community college to offer training in digital audio production, audio-engineering and recording techniques. In its first year in operation, TRAC has attracted more than 150 students from aspiring young musicians to industry professionals looking to catch up on the latest software.

"I saw a need for it and what better place to learn about recording than a recording studio," Dyson said.

Students enroll in a 24-hour class to learn the Digidesign Pro Tools system, the music industry standard for recording. The classes are hands-on, the instructors are seasoned pros and many of the classes take place right in the neighboring recording studios. Classes range from beginner to advanced and students learn more than just the technology. Classes touch on details such as what kind of angle to set a microphone on a drum set and how to coax a performance out of a nervous musician.

"I was looking for something like that for a long time," said TRAC student John Deskovitz, 21.

He said TRAC offers smaller class sizes that allow for an easier interaction with instructors, and there's also enough equipment for everyone to do their own thing.

"I learned a bunch and everyone there is super-friendly," said Deskovitz, a junior at Palomar College.

Thanks to what he's learned through TRAC, he's used the techniques to improve his college radio show and better record his own, and his friends', music.

TRAC mastermind Dyson is a Londoner



KAREN BILLING

Studio West owner Peter Dyson of Carmel Valley has launched a successful training program called The Recording Arts Center in Rancho Bernardo.

who moved to Austin, Texas in 1991 to marry his "dear wife" Amy. He met her at a Passover dinner during an American vacation. He worked for 14 years for Motorola, mostly in business planning and development and human resources. But there was always the musician inside him itching to get out and play.

Since Dyson was a kid, he'd been into music — playing drums with knitting needles on the side of his family couch. His parents wouldn't buy him a drum set, they preferred he learn guitar or piano, but Dyson was determined. He worked construction for a summer at age 15 to buy his first drum set.

Throughout college he played in bands but kind of left music behind when he came to America, consumed with the valuable priorities of getting married and starting a family.

Music started creeping back into his mind at Motorola, where he was doing a lot of ca-

reer counseling, telling other people to do things they were passionate about.

"I ended up listening to my own advice," Dyson said.

After his wife's parents made a move to San Diego, he started doing research about area recording studios. Thanks to a fateful 4 a.m. Google search, he found Studio West was for sale. So the family, which now included children Alex and Emma, moved to Carmel Valley.

"We just loved the area and it was really convenient for me," Dyson said of Carmel Valley.

Alex is now a fourth grader at Solana Highlands and Emma is a sixth grader at Solana Pacific.

When Dyson took over Studio West, he made the necessary

improvements, a \$1.5 million, 18-month redesign which included updating a color scheme that he said smacked of "Miami Vice"—lots of pinks and greens. Since

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Dyson has taken over, sales have grown by 60 percent and the business has been significantly helped by the addition of TRAC.

The studio's main live room caters to orchestras recording film soundtracks and church choirs cutting spiritual albums. The studio has glossy wood floors and a cool rock feature on one wall.

There are isolation booths just off the main room and the large space looks into the sound booth, which is loaded with an "old school" console full of switches. It's basically the analog version of what can now be done on a computer. On several occasions, TRAC students get to come and play in the sound booth.

"They love coming in here," Dyson said.

The post-production room across the hall plays host to voice-overs for movies, TV and radio. It's where actor Richard Dreyfus has been frequenting to perform the role of Moses in audio version of the Bible and where the only person to leave Dyson starstruck, Chargers star Ladanian Tomlinson, came to do some commercial work.

For those interested in learning more about TRAC, they are offering a free seminar on Saturday, Feb. 16 from 1-3 p.m. To register call (858) 592-0556 or visit www.tracsd.com.